

# **Sport Management Labour Market: Discrepancies Between Skills Offered by Graduates of an Academic Sport Management Programme and Skills Required by Employers of Sport Managers in Germany**

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## **Introduction**

For decades the heterogeneous sport labour market in Germany has been experiencing constant growth and in the course of social change will turn more diversified due to commercialisation and professionalisation and subsequently also through Europeanisation, globalisation and digitalisation (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2007). The principal-agent theory serves as framework for an analysis of the labour market situation. It is assumed that there is a metaphorical contract between the labour market (principal) and higher education (agent) (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). Within the contractual relationship the labour market assigns higher education institutions with the task to train graduates of sport management programmes according to current and future needs of the labour market (Nagel, 2006). The integrative design of academic vocational training requires an intensive analysis of the needs and expectations of the labour market (Arnold, 2015). At the same time a critical analysis is required to find out whether German academic sport management programmes meet labour market needs (Dunkel, Wohlfart & Borchert, *subm.*). This study focuses on the following key questions:

- What jobs, including related tasks and roles, exist in the sport management labour market?
- What competencies do employers expect from (potential) employees?
- Which positions do graduates of academic sport management programmes aspire?
- Do graduates of academic sport management programmes fulfil competency requirements of employers?

## **Method**

The present study is undertaken in two stages. As a first step, 101 experts working in the German sport management sector participated in a survey conducted from 11/12/2017 until 31/01/2018. The survey was conducted within the ERASMUS+ project *New Age of Sport Management Education in Europe*[1] to identify skills required by current and future sport managers as well as to compare them with the sport labour market and higher education programmes in the context of Europeanisation. 52 German experts completed the questionnaires (51% response rate). The results were analysed descriptively and exchanged during a partner meeting where they gave rise to controversy. In a second step, the authors designed a second survey for graduates based on the German results. It focuses on career aspirations of students and the skills they acquire during their sport management studies. The written questionnaire will be handed out to all sport management students of Leipzig University who are in the last semester of their studies from 01.05.2018-31.07.2018 (n=70). The results will be analysed descriptively and used to compare, present and interpret skills of graduates and skills required by employers.

## **Results**

The 52 experts (18 % female, 82 % male) who participated in the employers' survey are managers or specialists with managerial tasks and represent typical sectors of (public, private, non-profit) as well as fields of occupation in the sport management labour market. Results show that not only the commercialisation and globalisation of sport will decisively change the fields of work of the respondents but also digitalisation. At the moment most available positions are allocated in social media and project management as well as in e-commerce/sales and public relations. In addition, the experts were asked to rate the importance of certain skills in the future. From a total of 72 skills the following clearly stand out: *digital marketing, networking, decision-making skills, oral communication* and the *ability to work in a team*. In comparison expert knowledge in sport science and more general administrative skills were deemed less important. The results of the second survey are yet to be obtained. Students are asked to evaluate their acquired competencies in the top 20 skills identified in the employers' survey. Expected results indicate that the skills acquired by the students generally match the needs of the labour market. However, especially in terms of future skills requirements, deficits are expected to arise due to the fact that the metaphorical contract between the labour market (principal) and higher education (agent) is incomplete when it comes to matching the training of sport management students and the needs of the labour market. Furthermore, differences in skills acquired by undergraduate and graduate students are expected.

## Conclusion

Digitalisation seems to be a force that will shape the German sport labour market in the future. This study also shows that soft skills will be increasingly important for future employees. The comparison of acquired skills of graduates (supply) and labour market needs (demand) indicates discrepancies that seem to be crucial for the future design of sport management programmes at higher education institutions. Arnold (2015) drew attention to the need for democratic legitimisation through evident proof and guidance for higher education institutions. This study shows that a one-dimensional analysis of supply or demand is insufficient. Thus, multidimensional analyses of stakeholders will gain significance in an ever-changing world. In order to reduce existing information asymmetries adequate mechanisms of cooperation between higher education institutions and the labour market are required.

[1] More information on the project is available here: <http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/eplu-project-details/#project/3e7a9fe8-7338-4a40-8ace-bc739d467a60> (status 29.01.2018).

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